



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACTS: Francesca Donlan, Jackie Parker

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239-338-3500

What's new from The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel *Hobie 16 World Championship, Island Hopper Songwriter Fest,* *new attractions, renovations and more*

LEE COUNTY, FL (U.S.A.)– In addition to great, year-round weather, shell-drenched beaches and the sparkling Gulf of Mexico, The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel in southwest Florida continues to provide new experiences for visitors to Florida's unspoiled island destination. For the latest vacation information, visit FortMyers-Sanibel.com

Save the dates and plan ahead:

Sixth annual Island Hopper Songwriter Fest

Returning Sept. 20-29, 2019, the popular event brings music back to the beach with new artists and events. The festival takes place over 10 days and offers a range of star-studded performances. It kicks off on Captiva Island Sept. 20-22; moves to downtown Fort Myers Sept. 23-26; and ends at Fort Myers Beach Sept. 27-29. islandhopperfest.com

Hobie 16 World Championship

Hobie 16 World Championships returns to the USA, after 35 years of events being held in other locations worldwide. And it's coming to the Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel Nov. 1-16, 2019.

Sailors from around the world will compete in three world championship disciplines: Women's, Youth and Open, and three additional disciplines; Masters Cup, Grand Masters Cup and Great Grand Masters Cup.

South Seas Island Resort will host more than 1,000 athletes and 336 teams on 60 new Hobie Cat racing catamaran sailboats for 16 sailing days. Sailors from 30 countries are expected to attend. In past world events, as many as 7,000 people have attended the championships.

-MORE-

What's new from The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel/Page 2

The Hobie 16 World Championships is the only sailboat class in the world to supply 60 brand-new identical Hobie Cats, 16-foot catamaran sailboats, for all competitors to race. Hobie Cat Company will provide the boats that will be used exclusively on the racecourse located just off Sunset Beach at the north end of Captiva Island. hobieworlds.com.

In the news

Relighting of Gasparilla Island Lighthouse

After a two-year renovation, the historic Gasparilla Island Lighthouse on Boca Grande has been returned to active status. It is formally designated as a “private aid to navigation,” or a PATON, as it is known. It will also appear on maritime charts as an official beacon for mariners.

The new light, in addition to having a replica of the original fourth-order Fresnel lens that was installed in 1927, includes a “turtle-friendly” Max Halo II LED amber bulb, provides a flashing light every six seconds as a nighttime aid to navigation for local boaters and fishermen. And it won't be so bright that it confuses hatchlings, who eventually make their way to the water.

The Gasparilla Island Lighthouse is one of only a few lighthouses accessible to the public on the west coast of Florida. Check schedule for details about tours and climbs.

barrierislandparkssociety.org

Citrus trees at Edison and Ford Winter Estates, Fort Myers

Young citrus trees on the Ford estate, are part of a new living exhibit that is a collaboration of several citrus industry groups and local businesses. The exhibit will showcase about 50 citrus trees and educate visitors on the history and importance of Florida citrus as well as Edison's and Ford's interests in agriculture. When Henry Ford purchased his Fort Myers estate in 1916, dozens of fruit trees, including orange and mango, were already growing in grove-like lines in this area of the property. The new citrus grove will include new signs and interactive displays.

edisonfordwinterestates.org/what-is-on-the-trees-at-the-ford-estate

Learn about your shells

A new app launched by the Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum on Sanibel Island helps shellers instantly identify more than 65 shells found on The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel. Created by the nation's leading shell experts at the museum, the app allows shellers to snap a photo with a cell phone and the app provides a shell guide with images and descriptions of each shell. shellmuseum.org/shell-app

Yoga classes with goats, flamingos, on the beach, at the gazebo

There is a yoga class for everyone at locations throughout the area. A few choices:

Yoga with flamingos at Everglades Wonder Gardens in Bonita Springs.

evergladeswondergardens.com

-MORE-

What's new from The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel/Page 3

Yoga under the gazebo at Lovers Key

<https://www.floridastateparks.org/index.php/events/yoga-beach-lovers-key-2>

Beach yoga on Fort Myers Beach

www.wechooseyoga.com

Goat yoga in Lehigh Acres

barnyardyogainc.com

Turtle nesting season

Each summer, loggerhead sea turtles travel hundreds of miles, to return to our Florida coastline beaches. Most adult loggerheads nest every year, laying several clutches of eggs. Turtle nesting and hatching season begins May 1 and lasts through Oct. 31. Unfortunately due to human actions, coastal development, loss of habitat, pollution, artificial lights, shrimp nets or boating related accidents, sea turtles are facing extinction. Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau and Turtle Time, Inc. are committed to protecting our endangered marine turtles. Help protect our sea turtles by following a few basic turtle-friendly rules. For a complete list of rules and more sea turtle information, visit turtletime.org

Sanibel Island celebrates status as *Bicycle Friendly Community*

Sanibel Island is celebrating its recently elevated Gold Status as a *Bicycle Friendly Community*. The League of American Bicyclists raised the previous Silver Status to Gold Status in recognition of recent extensions and improvements to its 26-mile Shared Use Path. It is one of only two communities in Florida to have achieved top status. The wide, paved trail covers the island from one end to the other along Periwinkle Way and Sanibel-Captiva Road, and also takes interesting turns along Gulf Drive and Rabbit Road. The newest extension connects Sanibel-Captiva Road's path to Bowman's Beach. mysanibel.com

Locally-owned breweries welcome visitors.

From Fort Myers to Cape Coral to Bonita Springs, area award-winning brewers and distillers blend local oranges, berries, honey and even chocolate with traditional ingredients into smooth tasting original creations. Want to tour a brew house or distillery? A guide directs visitors to the locations. To print a brew trail map and to read details of each of the local breweries, visit fortmyers-sanibel.com/local-breweries

Renovations, additions and coming attractions

There's always something new at The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel as accommodations and attractions plan renovations and additions that are vital to keeping our product fresh and up to the expectations of our visitors.

-MORE-

What's new from The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel/Page 4

J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge, Sanibel Island

The Bailey Tract has been restored to its historic marsh status and visitors are now seeing more birds than ever, including some not seen in 40 years. In addition, the wildlife refuge has gone solar. A new solar kiosk informs visitors about its solar conversion and the energy and dollar savings that have resulted. Coming soon: In late 2019, the refuge celebrates its 75th anniversary. Beginning in November, a three-month Clyde Butcher exhibit, programs and commemorative events run through 2020. Award: America’s Best Bathroom, October. 2018.

fws.gov/refuge/jn_ding_darling

Alliance for the Arts, Fort Myers

An enhanced parking lot, new sidewalks, crosswalks and lighting promote pedestrian access and safety to the facility. Coming soon: A two-acre renovation linking the natural environment with the creative spirit of art. The project includes a towering centerpiece, *Caloosahatchee Water Wall* by acclaimed artist Michael Singer. artinlee.org/WaterWall

DiamondHead Beach Resort, Fort Myers Beach

Room renovations are expected to be completed this year. A new restaurant, Coste Island, serves breakfast, cocktails and dinner. diamondheadfl.com

Outrigger Beach Resort, Fort Myers Beach

The resort has completed the renovation of its 144 guest rooms. Recipient of the 2018 Thomas Cook “Sunny Heart” award for North America. outriggerfmb.com

Point Estero Beach Resort, Fort Myers Beach

Renovations in 2019 include painting and new furnishings. pointeestero.com

Candlewood Suites, Fort Myers-Sanibel Gateway

Property is in the process of completing a renovation of suites and public areas.

fmyerscandlewood.com

The Luminary Hotel & Co. to open in 2020, downtown Fort Myers

The 237-room, 12-story hotel along the waterfront of downtown Fort Myers plans to open in fall 2020 with 8,000 square feet of function space. It will be connected to the neighboring Harborside Event Center. A signature restaurant, rooftop lounge, culinary theater, indoor and outdoor fitness facility, and spacious pool area on the fourth floor overlooking the Caloosahatchee River, as well as a local diner and retail space at street level will be included. Outlets: Silver King, Ella Mae’s Diner, The Workshop, Beacon Social Drinkery. Visit camera.deckchair.com/luminary-hotel-florida-usa to watch the construction.

The hotel will be a part of the Autograph Collection® of Marriott International, Inc.

mainsailhotels.com

-MORE-

What's new from The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel/Page 5

Margaritaville Resort, Fort Myers Beach

Playing off the brand and laid-back beach lifestyle made famous by singer and songwriter Jimmy Buffet, the resort will be built near the Times Square area of Fort Myers Beach with opening planned for 2021. www.tpi-fmb.com

Fish-Tale Marina, Fort Myers Beach

Estero Bay Express has partnered with Mound House to offer excursions to Mound Key seasonally from October through April. esterobayexpress.com

The marina has added new rental boats and renewed its “clean & resilient marina” certificate. It was voted “best waterfront marina” and “best waterfront dining” by readers of the Fort Myers News-Press. Fishtalemarina.com

Florida Repertory Theatre, downtown Fort Myers

The award-winning theatre that the Wall Street Journal called “One of America’s Top Repertory Companies,” has done upgrades to the interior of the theatre located in the historic Arcade Theatre. Tickets for the 2019/2020 season are available at floridarep.org

Offshore Sailing School, Cape Coral, Captiva, Fort Myers Beach

A catamaran motor yacht has been added to the fleet at Westin Cape Coral Resort. For the first time, the school is offering a “fast track to power cruising” certificate course in the U.S. Offshore Sailing celebrates its 55th anniversary in 2019 and has taught more than 150,000 adults and families. offshoresailing.com

Annual festivals and events

Happening now

9th annual Fort Myers Film Festival

April 10-14, 2019

Sidney & Berne Davis Art Center

fortmyersfilmfestival.com

The Fort Myers Film Festival is an intelligent independent filmmaker's preferred event to create, unite and showcase the finest artistic cinematic works. Known for its support of local filmmakers, the event is a must-attend for cineastes who love indie film and film festivals. Check out all the details on the website.

14th annual Fort Myers Beach Film Festival, Fort Myers Beach

April 24-28, 2019

fmbfilmfest.com

The Fort Myers Beach Film Festival invites independent film fans, filmmakers and distributors to spend four days to exchange ideas, make new contacts and enjoy some great films for all ages.

-MORE-

Festivals and annual events at The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel/Page 6

Area accommodations offer special rates and packages to support this international celebration of independent filmmaking.

Smoke on the Water Barbecue Competition & Music Festival, downtown Fort Myers April 26-27, 2019

239-333-1933

sbdac.com/smoke-on-the-water-fort-myers

The Sidney & Berne Davis Art Center will host barbecue cook teams from across the South to compete in the Smoke on the Water Barbecue Competition & Music Festival 2018. This free community event brings an authentic experience of craft barbecue, beer and bands.

Upcoming events

“Ding” Darling & Doc Ford’s Tarpon Tourney, Sanibel Island

May 3, 2019

239-472-1000

dingdarlingtarpontourney.org

To celebrate the history of the first documented tarpon caught on a rod-and-reel in “Ding” Darling’s Tarpon Bay in 1885, Doc Ford’s and the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge have partnered to host this 8th annual “catch, care, and release” tournament. Proceeds support the wildlife and conservation efforts at the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge. Check out all of the details on the website.

23rd annual MangoMania Tropical Fruit Festival, Pine Island

July 13-14, 2019

239-283-0888

mangomaniafl.net/

The mango is the star attraction for two days each summer on Pine Island. Go wild for fruit as you sample locally-grown delicacies at this annual affair, an unusual celebration of all the tropical fruit grown on the island, which includes lychee, carambola, longan, papaya, and “chocolate pudding fruit.” Fruit, exotic fruit trees, and fruit-related products are available for purchase. This fun, family event celebrates Pine Island’s mangoes and other tropical fruits. In addition to mango food and beverages, the event features live music, art and craft vendors, food and recipe contests, and activities area for kids and a chance to meet the Mango Queen.

33rd annual Oktoberfest, Cape Coral

Oct. 18-20 and 25-27, 2019

German-American Club

239-283-1400

capecoraloktoberfest.com

Hosted by the German-American Club, this huge celebration brings organizes Munich to Cape Coral. The Cape Coral Oktoberfest is the largest party of the year in the community and is THE event for fun, good food, freshly poured domestic and German beer, live music on several stages, laughter, dancing. Call or check website for schedule and ticket information.

-MORE-

Festivals and annual events at The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel/Page 7

31st annual J.N. "Ding" Darling Days, Sanibel Island

Oct. 19-20, 2019

239-472-1100

dingdarlingdays.com

Conservation Art Day on Saturday, Oct. 19, kicks off the "Ding" Darling Days weekend with Federal Duck Stamp Winners, other artists, cartooning, and nature art -- a day devoted to Jay Norwood Darling's legacy as the first duck stamp artist and Pulitzer Prize-winning political cartoonist.

Family Fun Day on Oct. 20, culminates the weekend of eco-activities with all-free Refuge tram tours, live wildlife presentations, hot dogs, crafts, and other family activities. Birding, boating, tram, and kayaking activities fill the weekend.

37th annual Taste of the Town, Fort Myers

Nov. 3, 2019

jlfmtaste.com

Alliance for the Arts

Join the Junior League of Fort Myers for a great day of food, music and kids entertainment for the 37th annual Taste of the Town. All proceeds from this event go to support the projects of the Junior League.

Cape Coral CoCoNut Festival, Cape Coral

November 2019

239-573-3121

cocofest.com

Sun Splash Family Water Park

Cape Coral CoCoNut Festival celebrates Cape Coral's reputation for coconuts, multi-cultural food, boating, fishing and wildlife. The festival will feature a national musical act, gymnastic entertainment, carnival rides, water-ski shows, tropical food, contests, coconut crafts and fireworks.

33rd annual Sand Sculpting Championship, Fort Myers Beach

November 22-Dec. 1, 2019

In front of Wyndham Garden Hotel

239-454-7500

fmsandsculpting.com

Come and join the fun on Fort Myers Beach for the 33rd annual American Sand Sculpting Championship and Beach Festival. Sponsored by the Fort Myers Beach Chamber of Commerce, this fun-filled event will include world-class master sand sculptors, a state championship contest, an amateur contest, sand sculpting demonstrations and lessons, and much more. With more than 1,000 tons of sand, master sand sculptors are returning to Fort Myers Beach forming the largest sand sculpting event in the state, plying their craft and showcasing their artistry in what *USA*

-MORE-

Festivals and annual events at The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel/Page 8

Today and CNN Travel have named a “must-see” and one of the 10 best sand sculpting competitions in the world.

**43rd annual Holiday Nights at the Edison & Ford Winter Estates, Fort Myers
November/December 2019**

239-334-7419

edisonfordwinterestates.org

Edison Ford Holiday Nights reflect the many contributions of Thomas Edison, Henry Ford and their families to the local community. It was chosen by the editors of *USA Today* as one of the *10 Best Historic Homes for the Holidays*. A not-to-be-missed holiday tradition, the historic buildings and more than 20 acres of gardens are decorated with lights and traditional decorations. The event offers a special holiday tour, Children's Tree Trail, Santa visits on select nights, refreshments and shopping in the Ford Cottage Shoppe, Museum Store and Garden Shoppe. For admission and details: www.edisonfordwinterestates.org/events/annual-events/holiday-nights/

**35th annual Christmas Luminary Trail and Open House, Sanibel and Captiva islands
Dec. 8 on Sanibel Island and Dec. 9 Captiva Island 2019**

sanibel-captiva.org

This event draws visitors from all over the world as they join local residents to celebrate the season with three miles of luminary candles and events.

**River District Holidays, downtown Fort Myers
Dec 1, 2019-Jan. 2, 2020**

fortmyersriverdistrictalliance.com/holidays

The calendar is packed with holiday events to get you in the spirit of the season. Festival of Trees, Holiday Stroll and Tree Lighting, Burroughs's Home & Gardens Holiday House, Music Walk, holiday concert and a New Year's Eve celebration to welcome 2020. Check the website for a complete calendar.

**Annual Port Boca Grande Lighthouse and Museum Lighting, Boca Grande
December 2019**

barrierislandparkssociety.org/events

Celebrate the annual lighting of the Gasparilla Lighthouse at 6 p.m. with music and refreshments. Gates open at 5:30 p.m.

Annual festivals and events

**Cape Coral Festival of the Arts, Cape Coral
Jan. 11-12, 2020**

capecoralfestival.com

239-699-7942

This annual event in its 33rd year draws hundreds of artists and more than 100,000 visitors.

-MORE-

Festivals and annual events at The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel/Page 9

**Twisted Strings, Fort Myers
Top Rocker Field at Six Bends Harley Davidson
January 2020**

twistedstrings.org

The annual, outdoor festival brings together classically trained musicians who fuse their years of musical training on stringed (and other) instruments with the sounds of jazz, blues, soul, rock, hip hop and world music. Visit site for lineup and ticket information.

**ArtFest Fort Myers, downtown historic district
Feb. 1-2, 2020**

239-768-3602

artfestfortmyers.com

On the waterfront in downtown Fort Myers, visitors enjoy made-in-USA original art by more than 200 artists. Enjoy food, music and fun for the whole family. Opening night activities: Jan. 31, 2020.

**Friends of Lovers Key Annual Vow Renewal, Lovers Key State Park
Feb. 14, 2020**

friendsofloverskey.org

Love is always in the air at Lovers Key State Park, but even more so on Valentine's Day. Couples renew their vows near the gazebo on the beach, while the ocean and gulls provide background music. The ceremonies at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. include a champagne toast, brunch or lunch, coffee and cake, socializing, photo, as well as door prizes and parting gifts. Reservations required. The non-refundable donation of \$100 per couple adds to the Environmental Education Center Fund. This event has been a sell-out in the past, so reserve a spot early by contacting event chair Judy Greenwood at 708-359-0466 or fjgreenwood@gmail.com.

**82nd annual Edison Festival of Light Grand Parade, Fort Myers
Feb. 15, 2020**

239-334-2999

edisonfestival.org

During February, Fort Myers celebrates the birthday of its most illustrious historical resident, Thomas A. Edison, in befitting fashion. Edison, who built a home on the banks of the Caloosahatchee River and spent 46 winters there, invented the light bulb and held more than 1,200 patents. So it's appropriate that the month of activities culminates with a lighted night parade. Invention competitions, parties, craft shows and a 5K run are all part of the festival.

Spring Training 2020

The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel is the spring training home of the Boston Red Sox and the Minnesota Twins. Get up close and see your favorite baseball players. What could be better than beautiful spring days and great baseball? For a complete listing of packages, special rates and information on a spring training vacation, visit www.FortMyersSanibel.com.

-MORE-

Festivals and annual events at The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel/Page 9

Boston Red Sox spring training
February/March 2020
JetBlue Park, Fort Myers
redsox.com

Minnesota Twins spring training
February/March 2020
CenturyLink Sports Complex, Fort Myers
twinsbaseball.com

**83rd annual Sanibel Shell Fair & Show, Sanibel Island
March 7-9, 2020**

Sanibel Community House
239-472-2155
sanibelcommunityhouse.net

Sanibel Island, named the best shelling beach in the U.S. and one of the best in the world, hosts shelling enthusiasts who gather each year for the shell fair that draws visitors from around the globe. One of the most unique events in the country, it began on a porch with just a few islanders and has evolved into today's fair that includes demonstrations, shell displays, crafts, prizes, food and entertainment.

**21st annual Southwest Florida Reading Festival
Fort Myers Regional Library Campus
March 2020**

Celebrate the power of reading at the 21st annual **Southwest Florida Reading Festival** at the Fort Myers Regional Library campus at 2450 First St., Fort Myers. The free, family-oriented festival is a chance to meet well-known authors and to focus on the importance of reading. There will also be books and authors for kids and teens. Check the schedule and list of authors at readfest.org

**62nd annual Fort Myers Beach Shrimp Festival and Parade, Fort Myers Beach
March 7-8, 2020**

fortmyersbeachshrimpfestival.com

The **62nd annual Fort Myers Beach Shrimp Festival and Parade** takes place at Lynn Hall Memorial Park on Fort Myers Beach. Both days are filled with fun, food and crafts as well as the world-famous Lions Club shrimp dinners. Shrimp are from our local fleets and are as fresh as you can get. Enjoy a 5K run, the Shrimp Festival Parade, crowning of the Shrimp Queen and a shrimp eating competition.

Editor's note: *The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel in Southwest Florida includes: Sanibel Island, Captiva Island, Fort Myers Beach, Fort Myers, Bonita Springs, Estero, Cape Coral, Pine Island, Boca Grande & Outer Islands, North Fort Myers and Lehigh Acres. For media assistance, visit www.fortmyers-sanibel.com/media-central/*